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frontiers

Issue 11 July 1988

Try Jim River for a laid-back float trip

One of those typically warm, sunny Interior Alaska weekends would be a perfect time for a rafting or canoe trip, wouldn't it? But where can you go that's easy to get to and where you can take the family? BLM has the answer: the Jim River.

This river is a perfect float trip for a family or a beginning rafter or canoeist. It is quiet, with no white water or rapids. If you're looking for wild adventure, this isn't the place; but if you want a quiet escape, the Jim River is ideal.

To get there, drive from Fairbanks to milepost 144.1 on the Dalton Highway, a four- to five-hour drive on the gravel road. The Jim River roughly parallels the Dalton Highway between mileposts 135 and 144. Within this 10-mile stretch the road crosses the river over three bridges.

You can put in a canoe at any bridge, but putting in at the third one provides a nice day-long trip south to the first bridge, nearest to Prospect.

As you float quietly down the river, you'll find the fishing is great for grayling and whitefish. If you have a valid Alaska license you're allowed to take ten grayling a day and have ten in possession.

As you glide through rolling hills covered with spruce forests, you might catch a glimpse of a black bear standing on the bank, or maybe a spruce grouse sitting on a log.

Moose splash across shallow spots in the river, breaking the quiet spell. It seems as though there's no one around for hundreds of miles, and yet the Dalton Highway is less than a mile away. You can stop and cook lunch on one of the many gravel bars along the river.

Inflating the raft, these fun seekers prepare for a peaceful outing on the Jim River.

Six to eight hours after starting out, you reach the point where the Bettles winter trail crosses the river, about two miles below Prospect Camp. This is the place to pull your boat out. There's a good road here, and river floaters often ferry a car to this place so they can load up here for the trip home

Below this point, there is no road access to the river. Only experienced and well-prepared rafters should attempt this section, because the river flows through a canyon where the water is rougher, and then into the south fork of the Koyukuk River.

Canoes and rafts are the best craft on this sometimes-shallow river. Motors would be a hindrance.

Bring a pair of waders or old tennis shoes in case you have to drag the boat through shallow places. As always, be prepared for any eventuality.

It's advisable to bring good maps when you travel unfamiliar territory. For more information on Jim River and others near Fairbanks, call the BLM Arctic District Office, (907) 356-5310, or write to the BLM Arctic District Office, 1541 Gaffney Road, Fairbanks, AK 99703.

-SM

Renovated West Fork Campground awaits summer visitors

Elegant new kiosk stands ready to shelter summer picnickers at West Fork Campground on the Taylor Highway.

Last summer more than 19,000 visitors crossed through the Canadian customs into Alaska on the road connecting Dawson City in Canada to Tok, Alaska. Almost as many left Tok for excursions into the Fortymile country or to travel on to Dawson.

Many who travel in this area like to stop at BLM's West Fork Campground at mile 49 on the Taylor Highway.

Newly renovated and expanded, this campground is situated near the West Fork of the Dennison River 61 miles north of Tok and 150 miles from Dawson.

In this area, the Taylor Highway slices through rolling hills covered with dark spruce and bright green birch and aspen. The hills alternate with river valleys and great expanses of flat land covered with black spruce.

In the fall the deciduous trees create a spectacular display of bright yellow, gold and orange foliage.

The upper loop of the West Fork Campground has 18 parking sites, each surrounded with spruce trees and blueberry bushes for privacy. Each site has a metal fire ring, tent pad and picnic table.

Larger recreational vehicles can stay in the lower loop of the campground. It has seven pull-through camping spots, each with a fire ring and picnic table area.

A shelter in the lower loop will become the trailhead for a trail BLM plans to build that will follow the banks of the West Fork River. Many beaten footpaths lead to the river now, but there is no maintained trail.

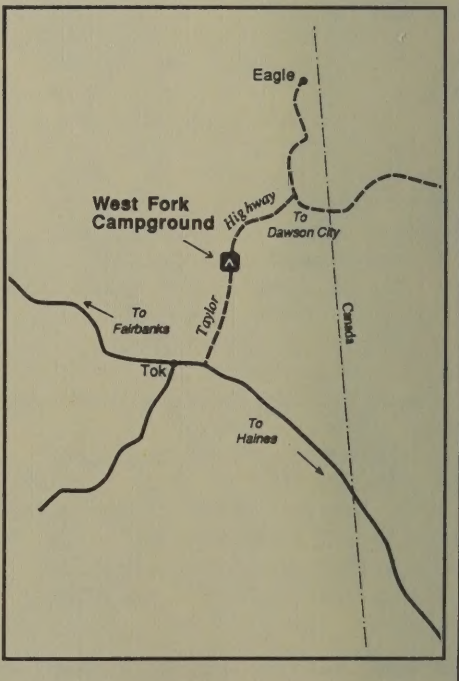
Although there is no drinking water available yet, the BLM is drilling two water wells this summer.

There is no camping fee for the campground, but stays are limited to 10 days.

The West Fork campground offers excellent birdwatching because of its diversity of habitats, especially in fall and spring when waterfowl migrate. Moose, caribou and other wildlife are found in this area.

The West Fork of the Dennison is part of the Fortymile National Wild and Scenic River, and this portion of the river has particularly clear water and beautiful spruce-lined banks. Grayling are numerous. The swift, gravel-bedded river is fairly shallow here, with deep pools alternating with riffles that can be forded. You can launch a canoe or raft when the water is high.

-SDW



BLM prints three placer mining draft impact statements; fourth on way

A recently released draft environmental impact statement on the cumulative effects of placer mining on the Birch Creek National Wild River analyzed five alternative scenarios for mining ranging from the status quo to no mining at all.

The proposed action is to "continue management of mining claims on federal lands as it was conducted during the summer of 1987." Mining activity under this alternative would be similar to the activity that occurred during the '87 mining season. BLM would manage placer mining according to State of Alaska water quality standards with EPA variances.

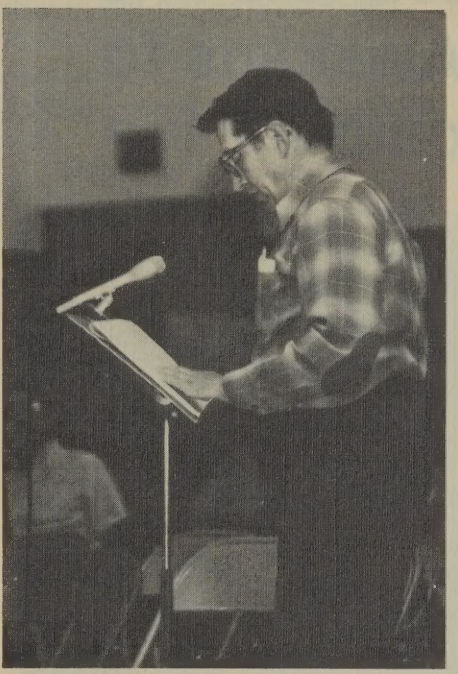
The Birch Creek National Wild River is located about 75 air miles northeast of Fairbanks. It runs through the Steese National Conservation Area.

In assessing the cumulative impacts of mining, the BLM interdisciplinary team examined a complex mix of factors including various reclamation and water quality standards; past, present and projected mining activity; and federal/non-federal actions.

Under the proposed action and alternatives A and B, mines discharging water into the creek would be required to meet a water quality standard of 2 milliliters (ml/l) of settleable solids per liter of water and a standard of 5 turbidity units (NTU) above natural conditions.

Alternative C calls for standards of 0 ml/l settleable solids and 0 NTU.

The Birch Creek draft EIS is the second of four court-ordered impact analyses the agency is preparing as a result of a lawsuit filed by the Sierra Club in 1986. The first to be released was for the Beaver Creek National Wild River, located approximately 35 miles north of Fairbanks in the White Mountains National Recreation Area. Its proposed action is to "continue the management of mining for claims on federal lands as it was conducted during the summer of 1987." Four other alternatives were addressed, based on 0 to 4 mines operating in the drainage. Water quality standards would vary accordingly from 0 to 2 ml/l and 0 to 5 NTU.



Roger Burggraf, chairman of the Fairbanks branch of the Alaska Miners Association, gave public testimony at the public meeting and subsistence hearing in Fairbanks June 2.

The BLM manages mining on these federal lands under several laws including the General Mining Law of 1872 and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and others.

The draft environmental impact statement on placer mining in the Fortymile River drainage has just been published and is now being circulated for review.

The last statement remaining to be published, on the Minto Flats, is due out in early July.

Copies of the documents are available at the BLM Alaska State Office, 701 C Street, Box 13, Anchorage, Alaska 99513.

-JS

About 25 people representing government, mining interests and environmental groups attended the Fairbanks meeting. Only a few people turned out in Anchorage.

Summer calls tourists and Alaskans to outdoor fun

BLM campgrounds are great places to let the kids have fun.

Whether you're interested in camping, hiking or whitewater floating, you'll find prime recreation spots easy to reach on BLM-managed Public Lands.

Denali Highway

The Denali Highway connects the towns of Cantwell and Paxson. It is a well-maintained gravel road offering broad vistas of alpine country, complete with glacial pothole lakes, tundra flowers and vistas of the Alaska Range. BLM operates campgrounds along the Denali at Brushkana, the Tangle River and the Tangle Lakes. This scenic route forms a convenient loop trip from either Anchorage or Fairbanks to Denali National Park.

The Tangle Lakes are now open for boating. This is a very popular fishing spot. The lakes have lake trout, burbot, round whitefish and longnose suckers. The access road to the Tangle Lakes campground will be closed from July 11 to July 30 for reconstruction. Signs will direct boaters to a temporary access point during construction. Off-road vehicle use in the Tangle Lakes area is limited to trails designated open for that purpose.

BLM recreation planner Larry Kajdan says, "All BLM campgrounds along the Denali and Richardson highways are overcrowded every Fourth of July weekend." for more detailed information.

Richardson Highway

Plenty of action can be expected along the Richardson Highway. BLM is building a new boat launch and new campsites at the Paxson Lake campground this summer, so campers there may encounter gravel trucks. Be cautious.

Kajdan says Sourdough campground on the Richardson Highway near Glennallen "will likely be filled to capacity from June 20 to July 30, since it is so popular with the fishermen going for the reds and kings.

"Large camping vehicles should avoid this campground," he cautions, "due to tilting bridge abutments on the access road."

Taylor Highway

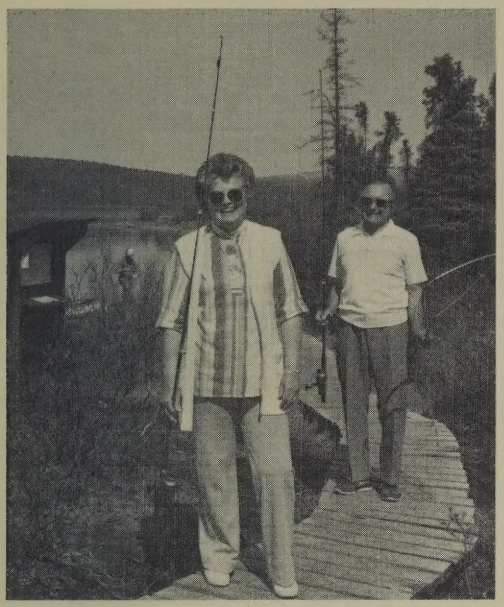
The Taylor Highway and the Boundary Cutoff provide access to the Yukon River communities of Eagle, Alaska, and Dawson, Yukon Territory. BLM operates campgrounds along the Taylor Highway near the West Fork of the Dennison (see article on page 2) and at Eagle.

The Liberty Creek campground has been closed because of lack of funding for maintenance. Walker Fork campground was expanded and modernized last year, but spring floods damaged six sites this spring.

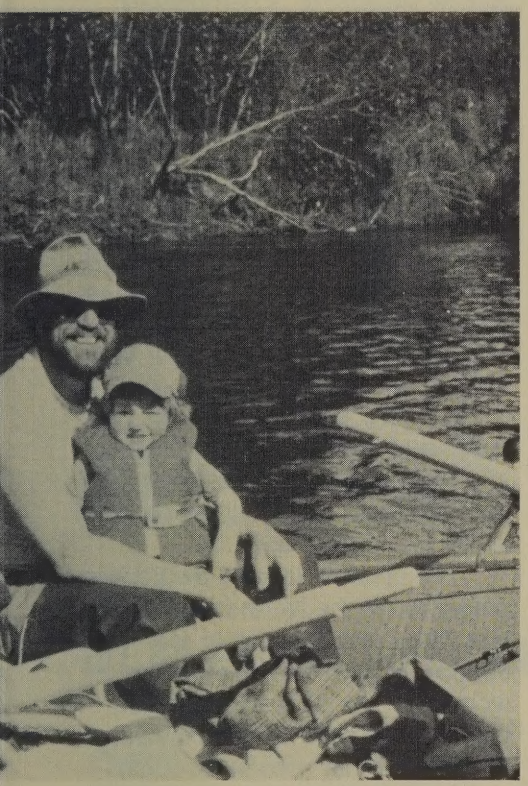
The Taylor Highway is getting new bridges and a widened roadbed this summer, so construction delays can be expected.

Moose Creek, Alaska...you don't have to be a whitev

BLM and the Eagle Historical Society cooperate in the management and maintenance of Fort Egbert National Historic Landmark. Eagle was the first city to be established in Interior Alaska, and Fort Egbert was established in 1899 to bring communications and order to the area during the gold rush. The



Paxson Lake has fishing for lake trout, burbot, rainbow trout, grayling and whitefish.



r expert to enjoy a river outing.

historical society offers a tour for visitors.

Fortymile River

Boaters have several options for trips on the Fortymile National Wild and Scenic River. At Mosquito Fork Bridge, the South Fork Bridge and the Fortymile Bridge, BLM maintains parking areas. Boat ramps suitable for small boat trailers are located at the South Fork and Fortymile Rivers. Call the BLM's Tok Field Office, (907) 833-5121, for the most recent information on river conditions.

Although spring generally comes late to the Taylor Highway area, the rivers and campgrounds are essentially ice-free and open now.

Steese Highway

Running north from Fairbanks to Circle City on the Yukon River, the Steese Highway provides access to Birch Creek National Wild River, the Steese National Conservation Area, the White Mountains National Recreation Area, historic Circle Mining District and the town of Central. BLM maintains campgrounds at Cripple Creek on the Chatanika River, at Bedrock Creek, and at Ketchum Creek near Arctic Circle Hot Springs Resort.

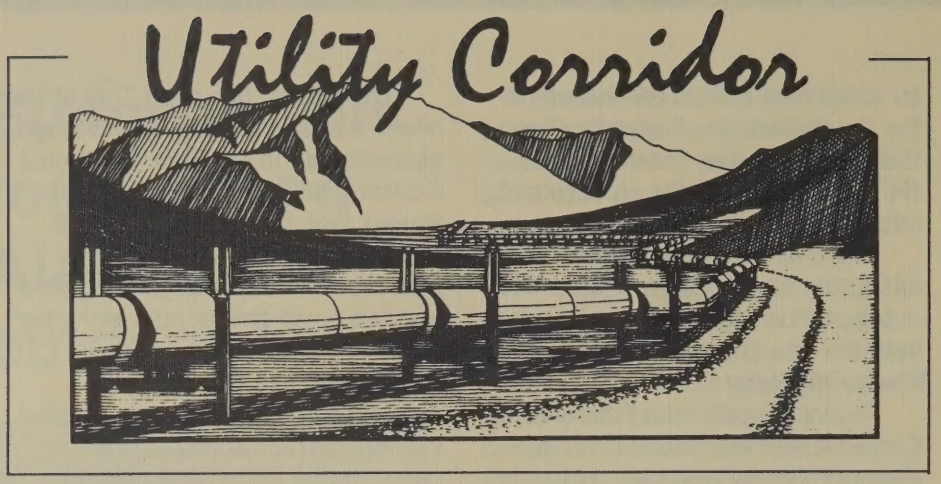
Boaters can canoe from Twelvemile Creek in the upper Birch Creek drainage to the Birch Creek bridge in five to seven days. This road-accessible float trip offers a good mix of whitewater excitement and wild scenery in the Steese National Conservation Area, and is less than four hours' driving time from Fairbanks.

The Pinnell Mountain Trail offers hikers a scenic 27-mile hike through alpine tundra in the Steese National Conservation Area. The tiny wildflowers that abound in the tundra reach their peak in June. BLM maintains the trailhead parking area and two small shelter huts along the trail.

It's best to check with the closest BLM office for more detailed information before you start a camping trip. BLM campgrounds are operated on a first-come first-served basis. There are no fees, but stays are limited to 10 days to two weeks depending on the location. Regardless of where you camp, leave your campsite cleaner than it was when you came. Use, share and appreciate your public lands.

-EB/JM

You can take trips of four to 20 days on the Gulkana River. This canoeist is on the West Fork.



BLM weighs comments on changes

Public comments are now being analyzed on a supplement to the draft Utility Corridor resource management plan. This plan will govern BLM's management of approximately 5 million acres within the Trans-Alaska Pipeline utility corridor and two adjacent blocks of land.

The supplement would change the plan's preferred alternative to allow the State of Alaska to select approximately 1.1 million acres within the corridor as part of its statehood entitlement. The original draft plan proposed opening about 40,000 acres of land for state selection. All other aspects of the plan would remain unchanged.

This proposal would consolidate blocks of land to make management easier, according to Tom Dean, BLM Arctic District manager.

"Managing the area in blocks will make it easier for both the state and BLM," said Dean.

Under the terms of the supplement, the state would be allowed to select land in two areas, one roughly between the Yukon River and the site of Old Man Camp, and the other reaching from a point north of Toolik Lake to the end of the federally managed portion of the corridor. BLM would retain the federal lands throughout the Brooks Range.

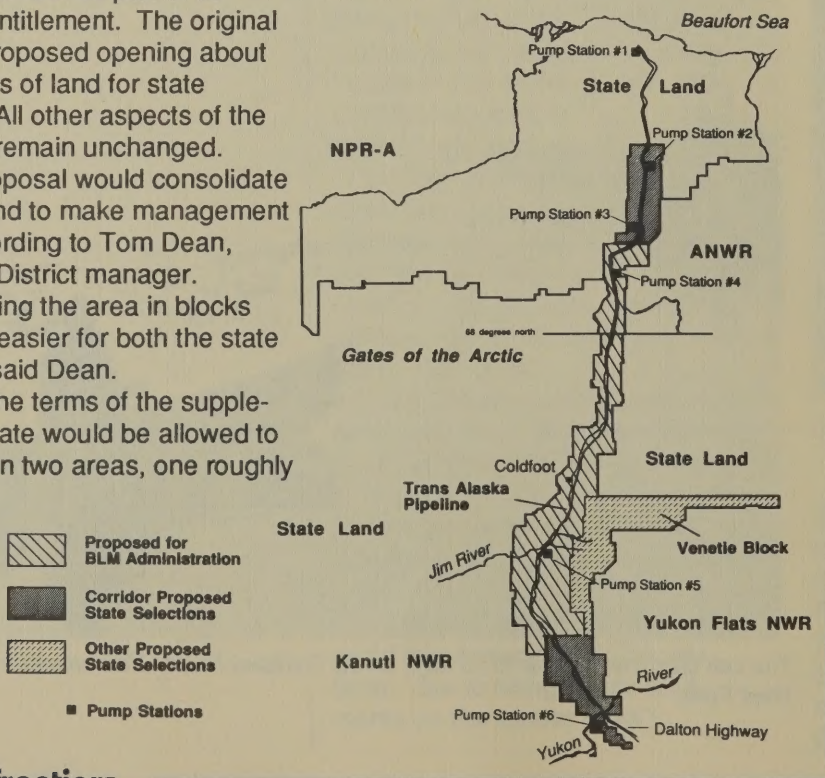
The supplement doesn't foresee any significant environmental impacts as a result of the proposal.

BLM held public meetings on the supplement at Stevens Village, Fairbanks, Anchorage and Barrow during a public comment period ending June 20.

"We're expecting to publish the Resource Management Plan by this fall," said Dean.

-JGM

Utility Corridor Planning Area



Alaskan groups win national volunteer awards

Prestigious national awards were presented to two Alaskan groups recently in recognition of their contribution to conservation and sound resource management.

The Anchorage Committee for Resource Education (A.C.R.E.) received a National Volunteer on the Public Lands award last month at a special ceremony. Presented by Under Secretary of the Interior Earl Gjelde, the award recognized A.C.R.E.'s 15-year contribution of educating children and adults about natural resources.

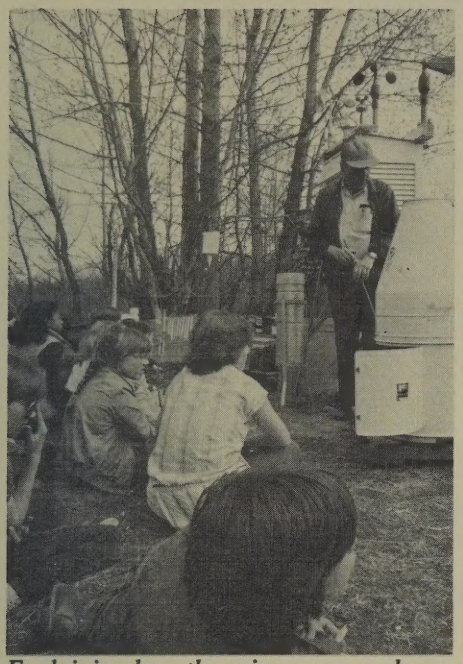
Comprised of individuals working in natural resource management agencies, the recreation field and in education, A.C.R.E. provides support to local teachers, both in the classroom and with instruction for the teachers themselves.

A.C.R.E.'s members have supported Alaska Outdoor Week and were responsible for helping to establish an outdoor school program in the Anchorage schools.

The second national award was presented to the North Star Volunteer Fire Crew, a group of 15 temporary BLM firefighters who worked for the BLM last summer, volunteering their time in between fires to do other natural resource work. Temporary firefighters are not paid between fires.

Members of the crew included: Arthur E. John, Bibiana Washington, Robert Jameson, Joseph P. O'Brien Jr., Mark Sims, Douglas Lawrence, Ben Juneby, Amos Frank and Edward Broadby.

-JS



Explaining how the rain gauge works.

Anchorage schoolchildren flock to BLM Outdoor Week

In May 2,000 sixth grade students from all over the Anchorage bowl headed for the woods. It was Outdoor Week, BLM's annual effort in cooperation with the Anchorage School District to educate the kids about their environment.

Some 76 people from 17 federal, local and private agencies worked to present Outdoor Week. They ranged from Boy Scouts to biologists. They taught classes in how to identify edible and poisonous plants. They taught short sessions on map reading and using a compass. They taught facts about bears and birds. And they even taught kids how to pan for gold.

Students sat open-mouthed when Ed Misiewicz of the U.S. Weather Service launched the big weather balloon, and it sailed off almost out of sight into the sky. He explained how all the information is gathered to produce the weather information.

When it was all over, some lucky students came away with flakes of gold. All came away with good information.

-JGM

Citizen councils advise BLM on issues

BLM's Northern and Southern Alaska Advisory Councils met jointly in Fairbanks in May to advise BLM managers on statewide issues.

The councils approved the preferred alternatives outlined in BLM-prepared draft environmental impact statements for the Birch and Beaver Creek watersheds.

They also urged the BLM to "take a strong and positive lead in coordinating all governmental actions . . . permitting, regulating and enforcement" of placer mining operations. BLM has recently spent close to three quarters of a million dollars assessing and studying placer operations on BLM-managed lands in northern Alaska.

Another resolution asked the BLM to "initiate the process for reevaluating the Resource Management Plans for the Steese and White Mountains areas to allow for potential mineral development to take place." These areas are located in northern Alaska.

A bill now in Congress to turn the National Petroleum Reserve Alaska (NPRA) into a wildlife refuge is unanimously opposed by the councils. The bill, HR 3601, would designate NPRA as the Teshekpuk-Utukok National Wildlife Refuge.

"A wildlife refuge would preclude transportation corridors and many other multiple-use options," said Sally Suddock, southern advisory council member.

Finally both councils commended the bureau for "its exemplary foresight and public service in launching the RAPS (Resource Apprenticeship Program) for rural students in Alaska." This program gives rural students work experience in several natural resource fields.

-DA

BLM employees clean up Ship Creek

BLM Alaska State Director Mike Penfold gave the okay for BLM employees to participage during working hours with the Anchorage municipality's Clean Creek program.

Twenty nine employees, shucking their office attire for grungy work clothes, worked along the banks of Ship Creek in downtown Anchorage. They picked up enough trash in two hours to fill several dumpsters.

The Municipality of Anchorage provided plastic bags and gloves. Although this is BLM's first involvement with the creek cleanup program, the agency has contributed truck and workers for previous citywide spring cleanups.

frontiers flashes

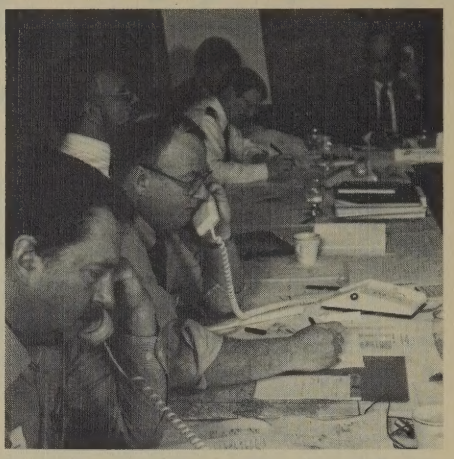
The final environmental impact statement on the proposed **Trans-Alaska Gasline System** is being released in June or July. The preferred alternative selects Anderson Bay near Valdez as the terminal for the project.

Copies of the impact statement will be available at public libraries throughout the state and at offices of the BLM and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Copies will also be mailed to those people who commented on the draft statement.

The next step is for the U.S. Department of the Interior to send Congress the proposed grant of right-of-way. Congress will have 60 days to review the proposal. If the Congress doesn't take any action, the right-of-way will be approved.

▽

The Anchorage School District has given the Bureau of Land Management an **Outstanding Volunteer** award for significant contributions of time and talents to enhance student learning.



Paul Gates (with pencil), of the U.S. Interior Department Office of Environmental Project Review, coordinated the work of BLM and other Interior Department agencies during recent ***joint exercises with the Soviet Union.*** *Purpose of the drill was to test the responses of local agencies during a simulated oil spill emergency. Four Soviet officials participated, and are negotiating an agreement with the Coast Guard to cooperate on any oil or hazardous waste spills in the Bering and Chukchi Seas.*

If you're interested in travel, wildlife research or getting out into the natural environment, you can **volunteer** to help the BLM count fish and inventory coho salmon runs in the Shaktoolik iRiver, about 40 miles north of Unalakleet on Northon Sound . The work would be from mid-July to late August or early September. BLM will pay your travel and supply all food and equipment. For more information call Joe Webb, Bob Barnes or Carl Kretsinger of the Kobuk District, BLM, Fairbanks (phone 356-5384).

▽

All BLM rookie **smokejumpers** receive their first training in Alaska, no matter where they eventually work. Although rookies have already had at least a year of fire fighting experience, they have to learn techniques specific to Alaska and to smokejumping. Only the BLM and the Forest Service hire and train smokejumpers.

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